

"THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR"

ALL THE YEAR ROUND

A Weekly Journal

CONDUCTED BY

CHARLES DICKENS

WITH WHICH IS INCORPORATED

"HOUSEHOLD WORDS"

No. 251. NEW SERIES.

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 20, 1873.

PRICE TWOPENCE.

YOUNG MR. NIGHTINGALE.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "HOBSON'S CHOICE," &c.

CHAPTER XXXII. A NEW FRIEND AND AN OLD ONE.

"WHAT! You live in Featherstone-buildings?" said Tony, when I asked him to come and see me there. "Really, you seem to have stepped into my shoes in a most surprising way. You sit at my desk in my uncle's office, and you live in Featherstone-buildings, where I lived when I studied law. I can quite believe that you occupy the very same rooms on the second floor."

And so it proved. Tony Wray had been the articled clerk of whom Vickery had spoken.

"I gave up the rooms," he continued, "when I gave up the law. The two were somehow connected in my mind, and so I abandoned both at the same moment. If you're going to make a change I always think it's as well to do it completely. Sweep everything off the board, and start fair and fresh. I've got a bedroom now at Hampstead, near the Vale of Health, for I've not been very well lately, and I've been recommended to sleep out of town, and the Vale of Health struck me as being just the thing. But I've a town residence also—I couldn't do without that—a kind of den in Staple Inn, Holborn, not far from you. You must come and see me. It's a little bit of a place, but it suits me until I really advance in my profession—I'm only beginning it at present—and a house in Cavendish-square—(I intend to move there some day—I have the exact house in my eye, indeed)—would be more than I could manage just now. My room is just the place for study. I pursue my

art there most admirably; that is, I think about pursuing it. The roof slopes a good deal, so that you might think yourself in a tent in the desert, for it would be wonderfully quiet if it wasn't for the cats. There's no view from the window; so you see there's little to disturb a studious mind. The place is something of a studio and something of a library. You'll like the look of it, I'm sure. My easel's there, and my paint-box, and a canvas or two, and my books—some legal, some medical, others miscellaneous. Altogether it's very complete and comfortable, if confined. But I don't want a large place, you know; and then it's cheap, and of course that's an object. For my means are limited. Did I tell you that I was an orphan? I lost both father and mother when I was quite a child—I can scarcely remember them. My uncle, Mr. Monck, was left my guardian. He deals with my little patrimony so as to make it yield as large an income as possible. And my wants are few, and some day I hope to be earning large sums by my professional labours; so you see, altogether, in a quiet way, I'm comfortable and happy enough. That's my story, Mr. Nightingale. But I can't really go on calling you Mr. Nightingale; I must say Duke, please, and if you could teach yourself to address me as Tony I should esteem it a favour. There's one advantage in having a long name, you can always cut it down."

I called him Tony thenceforward, and he called me Duke, and having heard his story, of course I told him mine. He was deeply interested, especially in the Rosetta episode of my narrative. This I disposed of briefly in the first instance, but as our friendship strengthened, I was not reluctant to discourse upon it very fully.

"Dear me," he said, "why it's quite a

romance. And she was beautiful? But she must have been if she was anything like your description of her, and I'm sure that's accurate. And you loved her! How interesting! I wish something of that kind would happen to me. How I should enjoy it! But nothing like that ever has happened to me. I've never been in love. No, I've never even fancied myself in love; and certainly, so far as I know, no one has ever been good enough to fall in love with me. Unless—" he hesitated, his face flushed a little, then, with a light toss of his head, he seemed to put the subject away from him. "And so she became Lord Overbury's wife! I think I've heard of Lord Overbury's name before. I'm not sure that there was not once some business connected with him in Mr. Monck's office, before my time though. I've a dim recollection of something of that kind."

I suggested that, as Lord Overbury was notoriously much involved, Mr. Monck might well have been concerned on behalf of one of the nobleman's many creditors. Tony thought that very possible.

He showed me his drawings, and in turn I exhibited mine. We exchanged congratulations on our progress in art, though I could not conceal from myself that my friend's works, if graceful and dexterous to a certain extent, were yet rather deficient in force and substance. He read me his poems. I thought them weak, though I did not say so. I read him mine, including many stanzas addressed to Rosetta. He was loud in his applause, and warmly urged me to continue my poetic efforts. It was not long after my first acquaintance with Tony that I commenced writing a blank-verse tragedy in five acts, founded upon a Venetian story, and entitled *The Daughter of the Doge*. I gave readings of this work, act by act, as I progressed with it, at my lodgings in Featherstone-buildings. Tony was my only audience, for I don't count my landlady and fellow-lodgers, although they could not but overhear my declamation. Indeed, they complained rather angrily of its disturbing nature. But the play was not read to them, or designed for their ears, and I thought their objections certainly coarse and uncalled for. I said as much to my landlady. "I did so hope that you'd be steady, sir," was her only reply, as she shook her head at me with a disappointed air. Tony admired the tragedy exceedingly. I invited his criticism, and assured him that I should greatly value and fully consider any suggestions

he might have to offer upon the subject. But he found the work perfect. "I wouldn't have a line or a word altered," he said. "Touch it, and you spoil it. It seems to me one of the finest tragedies in the language." Could I ask for more cordial approval? What wonder that I loved him?

I see now that his absolute lack of critical or judicial faculty greatly endeared him to me. I took blame to myself that I was unable to applaud his labours as heartily as he applauded mine. Yet his candour and fervour were quite unquestionable. He had entire faith in his praises of me. He really believed that I was a great artist and a distinguished poet. Not that I wholly credited all he said of me, or ventured to think his opinion would prove to be the world's verdict; I promised to be fully satisfied if others would accept me at any approach to Tony's appraisal. But I began to think more of myself, if less than he thought of me. Nevertheless ours was not a friendship that depended upon mutual admiration. He gave liberally, but he asked for little in return. He was content with quite a modicum of approval. His estimate of himself was really humble. He was most unselfish. Such vanity as he possessed was of a most pleasant kind, and really seemed a becoming adornment of him; it was part of his genial good-natured view of all around him.

To me this new friendship with a young fellow of my own standing, little more experienced in the ways of the world, was of extreme comfort. My life in London was no longer tedious and solitary; it became replete with harmless, or not very harmful, pleasure. We were constantly together. We met at the dining-rooms in Rupert-street, and, my official duties concluded, we adjourned to my lodgings or to his chambers. Sometimes we went together to the play. And we talked on all kinds of subjects, notably upon art, literature, and the drama, with occasional wild incursions into the vague regions of metaphysics. Little injury resulted, perhaps, from these debates, except that we were tempted to keep unduly late hours, and to consume more tobacco, and to empty more glasses than was altogether advisable. Tony gave up his lodging at Hampstead, and contented himself with his town residence. His health was not benefited by this change of place.

Our friendship was made up of what Rousseau has held to be the best materials in that respect; similar sentiments, diffe-

rent opinions. Or it had perhaps a safer foundation in a reciprocity of kindly thoughts, words, and deeds. Our characters were unlike somewhat, yet each seemed competent to understand and appreciate the other. There was no rivalry between us; if we were both aiming at public recognition and distinction it was in so prospective and distant a way that no thought of competition disturbed us; it was rather as though we had joined forces against a common foe. And we were not critics of each other's capacity, even though I found myself less enthusiastic on Tony's side than he was on mine. On either hand there was, at any rate, no throwing of cold water—better, perhaps, if there had been. If excuse is needed for us—and perhaps only the cynical will insist upon apology in such case—we were both very young, and, seeing that youth must love some one or something, we were, for the time being, in the absence of other objects of affection, in love with friendship. Between us there soon took root and growth an agreement and pact of this nature, strong, effusive, and unreasonable, possibly, but yet, without doubt, sincere enough.

I wrote home glowing accounts of my new friend, and the solace and happiness he had conferred upon my life. My mother was much interested. She asked innumerable questions concerning him, even as to his looks, and manner, and mode of life. She was most anxious, it was clear, that I should make no unworthy acquaintance. She was more satisfied when I had fully replied to all her interrogatories. She looked forward, as I began to do myself, to his visiting the Down Farm in my company. I felt that she desired to contemplate my friend with her own eyes. Yet she transmitted him many kindly messages, and when a hamper of game, or poultry, or other produce of the farm was sent to me in London, there was now always an additional supply to be placed at the disposal of Tony Wray. The invisibility of Mr. Monek was no longer commented upon. It had given place to this new topic.

I was returning to the office one evening after dinner. I confess that I was rather late. I had, indeed, surrendered those habits of punctuality which had originally distinguished my career as an articled clerk. I had rather taken up with opinions to the effect that the law was a loitering kind of profession.

The office was feebly lighted, but I perceived that a stranger was standing by

Vickery's desk. I could not see his face very well, it was shadowed by his hat.

"Bank-notes and gold for the full amount," he said, and it seemed to me that his voice was familiar to me. "For the full amount, including costs. You will be good enough to give me a receipt. I am also instructed to say that the claim would have been satisfied long since but that it was overlooked—by inadvertence, sheer inadvertence. We are much occupied by very important matters, and trifles of this kind are likely to be overlooked. We cannot always be bearing in mind the claims of tradesmen. They should be content with our recollecting them when we have need of their services. It was not right to issue a writ; it was wrong to serve it. I say so much on my account. I was not bidden to say so much. But I happen to have an innate and constitutional objection to legal proceedings of every kind. However, I tender you the amount due. I am instructed to give no trouble in that respect, although I am well aware—I speak from experience—that claims are not usually settled so promptly or so pacifically."

He spoke rather pompously, and as one enjoying the cadences of his loud, rich, but somewhat husky voice. Vickery was writing out a receipt for him.

"A lawyer's office," said the stranger, glancing round him, but his eyes did not chance to rest upon me. "I've seen one before; indeed, I have seen many. Lawyers' offices are the ante-rooms of debtors' prisons. That's my view of them. They are mouse-traps, easy to get into, hard to escape from."

He smiled, then took off his hat, with rather an exaggerated air of politeness, as Vickery handed him the receipt. His hair was thinly streaked over rather a bald head. He strutted out.

"Who is that?" I asked.

"I don't know. He's paid the debt due by the party you served the writ upon the other day. What does it matter who he is?"

It darted into my mind; the man, though considerably altered, was my old friend Mauleverer—Fane Mauleverer!

I hurried after him. The square and street were empty and dark. I turned to the right, and ran some yards. But I was too late. Mauleverer had vanished.

CHAPTER XXXIII. I AM WANTED.

It was clear that Mauleverer had not recognised me. I was really vexed that I

had failed to overtake him. I obtained no sympathy, however, from old Vickery. He evaded my questions and forthwith locked up all the papers connected with Messrs. Dicker Brothers' action. If I could have ascertained the name and address of the defendant, I might have discovered Mauleverer. There could be no doubt that he was in the employ of the gentleman I had served with the writ.

Of course I informed Tony of the matter. From my previous narrative he knew all that I knew about Mauleverer. He was amused with this supplemental news, and expressed his interest therein. But he would not admit that there was anything strange in the fact of my again meeting with my old friend the stroller.

"Of course you have seen him again," Tony said in his pleasant way, "and equally of course you will see him again by-and-bye. I often think the world was made round expressly to enable people to meet. If it was a flat plane, you know, we might all go travelling on in parallel lines and never meet a soul, and when we got to the brink tumble off into chaos, and no one know that we had ever existed or had ceased to exist. As it is we go round and round, and we must meet some one. Why not a friend, then, as likely as a stranger? My wonder is that we don't meet our friends oftener. Life is made up of meetings. It is true that there are partings, too; but then those partings are, as it were, preludes to further meetings. All the same I wish you had overtaken Mauleverer. I should really like to see him. You might have brought him up to my chambers. He was an artist, you say, as well as an actor? All the better. Not that I think black-shade-cutting a very elevated branch of the profession. Still there's a good deal to be said for it, no doubt. I never tried it, but I question if it's so easy as it looks. Mauleverer should have cut out a black-shade of me if he felt so inclined. I'd have made a sketch of him, say, in chalks. And he might have read Shakespeare to us; you say he was a great hand at that. I should have much pleasure, I'm sure, in listening to him. Or better still, he might read out your tragedy. Not but what, old fellow, you know, you read it as well as it could possibly be read. And a finer work let me tell you——"

I omit his glowing and certainly excessive laudation of my performance.

"But you'll meet Mauleverer again," he continued. "You may be quite easy as

to that. Have you anything special to say to him when you do meet him?"

I admitted that I had not. But I owned to curiosity concerning him and his proceedings, and particularly I desired to know his connexion with the gentleman I had served with the writ.

It was some days after this. I was sitting at my desk, copying, or perhaps making believe to copy. Vickery approached me with a solemn air, and whispered mysteriously:

"I am to ask you, Mr. Nightingale, to step up-stairs to the first floor—the front drawing-room."

"Who wants me—Mr. Monck?"

"You will probably learn that up-stairs, Mr. Nightingale. The front room, please. You needn't mind about leaving your work."

Of course I did not mind about it. Up-stairs? I was to enter for the first time the secret chambers of the house; possibly to penetrate the strange seclusion of my master, Mr. Monck.

I mounted the stairs. I paused and tapped at the door I found facing me. "Come in," said a light voice.

A young lady, simply clad in a dark dress that fell in soft folds about her slender figure, was seated before a writing-table littered with papers. The light, strained through the dust-clouded window-panes, gleamed feebly upon her, failing to reach the corners of the room. I perceived, however, that she was young and refined-looking, with abundant dark hair smoothed over her brow, and gathered into rich coils and clusters at the back of her head. A narrow collar of white lace edged the top of her high dress. By contrast with it, her complexion seemed to be a dusky brunette hue, yet of fine satiny texture. When she spoke her pallor vanished, and as her large eyes kindled, an underflush of colour glowed in her face. It was a young face, animated and full of expression, earnest and intent, even somewhat sad.

The room was large; the furniture worn and very old-fashioned; the hangings of a faded dun colour; the wall paper and ceiling dim with smoke and dust; the carpet frayed and threadbare, all trace of pattern rubbed and trodden from it.

The lady rose as I entered.

"I must introduce myself, Mr. Nightingale," she said, with rather an embarrassed air, as she extended her hand. "My name is Rachel Monck—I am Mr. Monck's daughter."

I pressed her hand; it was very small, of

delicate shape, soft and cool, though it trembled a little in mine.

"Will you sit down, please. I have been anxious for some time past to see you—to speak to you; but many things have occurred to prevent this. And now I fear I have deferred it too long. I hardly know where to begin."

Her speech was something to that effect; but I was paying less heed to her words than to the soft music of her voice, and the subdued tremulousness which lent it a peculiarly touching quality. And if she was disturbed, I was still more so. I had not yet recovered from my amazement at finding myself in Mr. Monck's drawing-room, in the presence of his daughter, of whose existence I had until then been absolutely ignorant. Vickery had spoken no word upon the subject—had afforded me no hint. How could I suspect that in the upper regions of Mr. Monck's mysterious house there dwelt this beautiful young creature?

She paused for a few moments; then proceeded with more composure.

"You have been surprised, I dare say, that you have not yet seen my father—that you have indeed seen no one connected with his business but Mr. Vickery."

I answered feebly, as I felt afterwards. I owned to a little surprise, but said that it was really of no consequence. This was stupid; because it almost implied that I insufficiently valued the opportunity of seeing Miss Monck; whereas this was in truth most interesting to me.

"I take blame to myself that there should have been anything like want of candour in your reception and treatment here, Mr. Nightingale. I felt all along that you were not being fairly dealt with. I wished that you should have known the truth from the first. But I yielded to one of greater experience. He was mistaken; I thought so then. I am confident of it now. Still he did it for the best. I cannot censure him. I owe him deep gratitude. To his unceasing care and kindness and fidelity I am heavily indebted. He has aided and comforted me in a time of very great trouble. A truer friend never existed."

Again her voice trembled, and it seemed to me that her large, dark grey eyes were glistening with tears. She bowed her head, supporting it by one of her thin supple hands, as she leaned forward upon her desk. Her face struck me as exquisitely sensitive. It was partly in shadow now, the light falling sideways upon her glossy, silken hair, and clear

brow, and small pink shell-like ear, from which a tiny ring depended. Yet I noted that her every passing emotion found expression in her pale, and even somewhat worn countenance. Just as a secluded lake, for all it seems so peaceful, and motionless, and sheltered, reflects now blue sky, and now sombre clouds, and now is rippled into frowns by the breath of the wind.

"I am speaking of old Mr. Vickery, for many, many years my father's devoted servant and most steadfast friend. His great kindness to me I can never forget, can never repay, can never sufficiently acknowledge."

It was new to me to hear the old man spoken of in this way. I felt that I had much underrated old Vickery—that I had done him great injustice.

"My father is ill, very seriously ill." As she spoke a tear fell on the papers before her. "He has not been himself for a long time past. He is able to see no one; he can do little or nothing. It tries him severely to sign his name, even to the few papers and letters that cannot otherwise be issued from his office. I trust he may recover. But I have hoped so long now that my heart is grown worn and weary with waiting and hoping—in vain, in vain. Yet I do not despair. I hope, and wait, and pray still, and my faith in Heaven's mercy does not waver. When your coming here was first proposed, Mr. Nightingale, my poor invalid was not nearly so ill as he is now. There scarcely seemed injustice in his undertaking—I should say, perhaps, in our undertaking on his behalf—to receive you as his pupil, and to do all that might be done to enable you to perfect yourself in your profession. That, at least, was Vickery's opinion. But I see now it was not right, it was unfair to you."

She paused. I felt that I ought to say something. But my surprise, my confusion, let me add, also, my pity for her did not permit me to speak. I could only move uneasily in my chair, trusting that sympathy might be sufficiently expressed by my looks.

"I must go on," she said. "Plain words are best. We were tempted by the amount of the premium to be paid by your relations. In truth, we are very poor. The sum was much needed by us. We coveted it, and we sinned in taking it. You may believe how much it pains me to make this confession. But it is right that I should make it. Already my heart is the lighter for having made it."

She covered her face with her hands. Her tears were now falling fast.

"Pray, Miss Monck," I said, finding speech at last, in an abrupt and rather bungling way, "do not think so seriously of so poor a matter. No sort of injustice has been done. You judge yourself far too severely. I have nothing whatever to complain of. I am only deeply sorry for Mr. Monck's ailing state. I fervently trust with you that he may be speedily restored to health. Pray do not let this matter touching myself trouble you further. I am grateful to you that you have had confidence in me, and spoken to me as you have spoken."

"I wish I had told you all before. You are most kind, Mr. Nightingale. But—there are others to be thought of. Will your relations approve of this arrangement when they know all?—and you are bound to tell them. I had this to propose. That, if you, if they so willed, your articles should be cancelled or transferred, and your premium should be returned—not all at once. That, I have it not in my power to offer. But by degrees, a little at a time, perhaps a very little. Still, that it should all be paid, to the last farthing, I pledge myself, though I work my fingers to the bone. I would not be dishonest, though I fear I may have seemed so."

I could not listen to this proposal, it pained me too much. I said that, in any case, there should be no paying back, or talk of such a thing. I assured her that I was perfectly content. That I had no reason whatever to complain, that she had none for self-accusation. That, under the supervision of Vickery, I was really getting on with my profession; that I was advancing and learning more and more every day. (It was not absolutely true, but, seeing her distress, I could not be cramped by accuracy.) That Mr. Monck's illness, deeply as I regretted it, was no real hindrance to my position as his clerk. Finally, I implored her to command my services in any way, and to make certain that I did not lack willingness to prove my sympathy, and to be of use to her if she would but show me how.

She thanked me again and again, smiling through her tears, I think, at the hurry, and perhaps the clumsiness, of my address. But she knew, she could not but know, that, in intention, it was thoroughly earnest and sincere. Upon my entreaty, she consented, with some hesitation, that things should remain as they

were—for the present, at any rate—in the hope that Mr. Monck's health might amend, and that meanwhile I should continue under the supervision of Vickery. I promised that I would spare no pains to content him and her. She was apparently pleased by my speech, as, indeed, I hoped that she would be.

"You are a kind friend, Mr. Nightingale," she said, as she again gave me her hand. "Pray believe that I am sincerely grateful."

"I may see you again, Miss Monck?"

"Indeed I hope so." This, and the sweet grace with which it was said, stirred my heart strangely.

"One moment," she continued, as I moved towards the door, for I had no excuse to remain longer. Gladly I returned to her side. "It's but a trifle, but Vickery was so anxious that I should speak to you on the subject. He is distressed about your handwriting."

"I fear it is very defective. I find a law hand so difficult to acquire."

"Not so very difficult if you take pains."

"I do try, I assure you, Miss Monck. And I will try more than ever now."

"That's right. Practice is necessary, of course. Vickery, perhaps, is too exacting."

"If I could only write like that. But I never shall!" I pointed to a document on the desk before her. It was written in the perfect clerky hand Vickery had so much admired, and had bidden me imitate.

"Oh, but you will. That's my writing." She smiled and blushed as she spoke.

The mystery was explained then. Rachel Monck was the secluded copying clerk. She had written the letters received at the Down Farm, and the many papers I had noted in the office. I glanced at her small taper fingers; there was not a speck of ink upon them. But I perceived that she wore over the sleeves of her dress loose cuffs of black calico, such as I had seen copying clerks assume in lawyers' offices and at law stationers.

"It is a beautiful hand," I said. Unconsciously my gaze wandered from the paper to her fingers. But she did not observe this.

"No, it's not beautiful," she said, simply. "But it's regular, neat, and legible. It has an official and business-like look; and it's not really difficult, though it took me some little time to learn. It is so different to the writing I was taught at school. But Vickery gave me lessons. He is quite

proud of his pupil now. He calls me the best copying clerk in London. But he only says that to cheer me."

She laughed pleasantly. It was wonderful how her face had brightened. I had thought her beautiful before, but she was to me still more beautiful now.

"You'll soon write quite as well—better, I'm sure, Mr. Nightingale."

In all she said and did there was a modest unconsciousness of meriting admiration, a graceful and tender humility that was singularly winning.

"If I can only write half as well I shall be satisfied. But you must find it very hard work, Miss Monck."

"No, indeed not. It's occupation. It doesn't try my mind too much, and yet it prevents me from giving way to painful thoughts. And then it's useful. I am helping my father. Really helping him, for if I did not do this some one must be paid to do it. It makes me happy to be of use to him. And I have to be so much alone, or watching by his bedside, for hours and hours together, day and night. But I can watch and write too. It was hard at first, perhaps, but it comes easy to me now. I would not give it up on any account. A woman, a girl, placed as I am, can do so little that's useful, really useful—in the way of earning money, I mean. But I talk too much of myself. There was one thing more I had to say."

I listened eagerly. Content, so far as I was concerned, that she should go on talking upon any subject. It was delightful to hear her, to look upon her.

She hesitated, turned from me to the window, pressed her hand upon her forehead, came back to her desk, and then said hurriedly:

"You know my cousin, I think, Mr. Wray—Tony Wray. You are his friend?"

I said yes. Tony was my dearest, my most intimate friend.

"You will be his kind, true friend, I'm sure. Besides my father, he is my only living relation. Naturally, he is very dear to me, and to my father. Pray take care of him. He is negligent of himself. He has lost both parents—both died young; and my poor boy—I always call him so, for I am to him as an elder sister; we have known each other from childhood—my poor boy is very delicate. I feel that he needs constant watching. He is light-hearted and careless, irresolute and unsteady, perhaps—though quite in a harmless way—unsuspicious, easily led by a stronger

mind than his own. Protect him, Mr. Nightingale—against himself. He should keep early hours, avoid over fatigue, breathe pure air. He fancies himself stronger than he is. Be a true friend and brother to him, Mr. Nightingale, for his own sake, if not for mine. Indeed, to me you have shown kindness enough already. I dare not ask for more. Yet this you will do, knowing now what perhaps you did not know before—for Tony's sake, for your own, as his true friend. He speaks of you in the highest terms. I am sure they are deserved."

There was an earnest, almost a passionate throb in her voice. I promised all she asked, and, as I took leave of her, pressed her hand to my lips. It was as though I had solemnly pledged myself to keep my word and sworn fealty to her.

As I descended the stairs, two things became clear to me. Rachel Monck loved Tony Wray. And I was in love with my master's daughter. Or if not absolutely in love, I was on the brink of it, and could not but go forward and fall in.

ROBERT JEFFREY OF POLPERRO.

If you are ever at Plymouth it will be worth your while to go westward along the coast as far as Fowey. The country is lovely; and it is remarkable, too, for having furnished much more than its proportion of gallant tars during the old French war. It was a grand place for smuggling all along there; and somehow smuggling and serving on board the royal navy generally go well together. They say poachers make the best gamekeepers; certainly scores of Cornish sailors must have had brothers and uncles in the contraband trade, and probably had run a good many cargoes themselves.

Well, just a little beyond Looe river, you will come to Polperro, as quaint a village—"town," I beg its pardon—as one could find anywhere round the coast of Great Britain. It has its history and antiquities. Leland, who is always exact about Cornwall, says, in his Itinerary, "From Pontus Cross" (now Punch's Cross, Fowey) "to Poulpirrhe about a six miles, wher is a little fishchar town and a peere, with a very little creke and a broke. There is a cricket" (flat sand—was the game originally played on such ground?) "betwixt Poulpirrhe and Lowe." This pier, supplemented in the seventeenth century by another at right

angles to it, enables the little place to exist. Even thus it has had a hard struggle. Do you know Dawlish? At any rate, you will have heard how many times last winter the sea-wall of that railway which Brunel traced close to the water's edge was washed away. Go to Dawlish when there is a good south-easter on, and you'll see that it is not the rocky "iron-bound" coasts which look best in a storm. I've seen a good deal of both, but I prefer being close to the waves instead of looking down on them; and so I give the palm to a low beach with cliffs some little way off. Such you have at Polperro; and the number of times the piers have been destroyed, and the ruins of the "palaces" (pilchard cellars) demolished by former gales, show how it must suffer in a storm, for all it looks so unlike "the thundering shores of Bude and Boss," or the granite bulwarks of the Land's End.

Everybody in Polperro either goes to sea himself or has a share in a boat. You can generally find on the beach a dozen stout fellows ready to talk to you by the hour. But I mustn't stop to tell you Polperro stories about pilchard fishing—how they shoot an enormous sean-net (say two hundred and twenty fathoms long and twelve deep) round the school of fish, and there keep them enclosed for days, while a little boat, the volyer (follower) goes inside with a tuck-sean, which is drawn round as many of the fish as the master seamer judges can be stowed away in cellar that day. This gradual clearing is a wonderful thing for everybody concerned; thanks to it the curing can be done properly, and a great many fish can be sold fresh; fancy, on the other hand, having to dispose all at once of a thousand hogsheds of dead pilchards! There would only be one way—a way in which too many of our takes of mackerel and sprats, as well as pilchards, are got rid of, in spite of ice and railways—to make manure of them. As it is, by this simple plan of keeping the fish enclosed in the big sean, you have time even to send a ship over to France for salt after the sean has been shot, and to get her back in time for curing. Polperro fishing, I'm afraid, has gone down—were you ever in a fishing place where they didn't tell you things are not what they used to be? Conger used to be largely exported (the trade is as old as King John's day). It was not salted, but cut through, sewn together, so as to form a flat surface, and then stretched on a frame

and dried. The process was an unsavoury one, and the loss from absolute putrefaction was heavy in wet seasons; but as live conger sold at five shillings per hundredweight, while "conger-douce" (sweet) as it was called, would bring thirty shillings, the trade lasted till the French revolution. It was then thrown out of gear, and now the conger is so scarce (like the herrings on the west of Ireland) that there isn't enough of it for home use. The Spanish and Italians used to eat the conger-douce grated into their soup. How they manage to eat the "fair maids" (firmados), salt pilchards with all their juice squeezed out to make cod-liver oil, I'm sure I don't know. I'm as fond as any one of a good fat pilchard, cooked fresh; even a salt one (cured like a Dutch herring) is not bad with new potatoes. You Londoners didn't show your taste in rejecting them last year when the railway took them up for nothing; but I don't think I could eat them in the firmado state. Popery, slavery, and wooden shoes used to go together in the old Orange toast; and I think you might well add dried pilchard as a climax. Nevertheless, it's hard to know how West Wales would do without pilchards. It has been a hungry land—albeit a hospitable—since the days when Andrew Boorde, Henry the Eighth's physician, and the original Merry Andrew, so emphatically condemned the Cornish eating, and above all the drinking, describing the beer as "thick whitish stuff, as though pigges had wrastled in it." The old rhyme,

Meat, money, and light,
All in one night,

is quite deserved; and working under tribute in a tin mine, even helped out by the cow and the potato patch, would be a sorry livelihood but for the yearly tribute of the sea, which brings a little ready money to everybody, for boys and girls and old women are all pressed into work as soon as curing fairly begins. That's the great blessing of this West Country, that the agricultural labourer, pure and simple, and the mere artisan, are alike unknown there. They may be rough (I am sure they are courteous too); they are bad at reading and writing; they are wild in their religions, and they are certainly too fond of speculating. But they don't put all their eggs into one basket. What with mining, and farming, and fishing, most of them have three strings to their bow—farming, please to remember, on a tiny scale; a farmer of five-and-twenty acres is a very big man down here.

And if the mine is "doing slight through the stuff turning out against you," while the potatoes are touched with the disease, why, then, it is a comfort to have the pilchards to look to. Years ago (as I said) smuggling was a fourth string; and stories are still told of those stirring days—how, for instance, one Potter, who shot a revenue man in the gallant defence of the Polperro lugger, Lottery, was hidden away for months, while Toms, his comrade, who had turned king's evidence, was captured under the very eyes of the dragoons, and got out of the way as far as Guernsey, where, unluckily for Potter, the government officers managed to recapture him. Other tales you may hear by the dozen in Polperro, tales in which teller and hearer can feel unmingled satisfaction—how the Providence, revenue cutter, was caught smuggling, sold by the revenue service to the Admiralty, rechristened the Grecian, and sent out to what in those days was the national rubbish-hole—the West Indies. Here the Grecians soon came across a pirate, had a gallant hand-to-hand fight with her crew, took the survivors into Kingston harbour to be hanged, and gained such credit, that orders came permitting them to return to their families or volunteer where they pleased. You will hear, too, how William Quiller, a well-to-do Polperro merchant, being in Plymouth without his protection, was seized by the press-gang, and hurried on board a frigate which was just sailing for Jamaica. Very fortunately the captain was a friend of his father's, so Quiller was appointed to the quarter-deck, and soon showed himself a fine smart fellow. His smartness was needed, for yellow fever broke out on board, the captain and all the superior officers died or were invalidated, and Quiller had to bring the vessel home. He did it so well that he got the command of a despatch boat, which, with sixty men, he did not hesitate to lay across a Frenchman with a crew more than three hundred strong. He beat her, of course—we always beat in those days—and his share of the prize money was two thousand pounds! What will the Polperro men do, now that ships have no canvas upon them? What's the use of telling the new race of sailors about the lugger Unity, which, finding itself one daybreak between two French frigates, shortened sail to allow them to board, and while they were busy with sails slack, getting out their boats, suddenly spread its wings and flew out between them

without a scratch to any one on board, and with scarcely a hole in her rigging? The thing seems nearly as far off as the old belief in the pisky (the Devonshire pixy), that ungrateful creature who, if a farmer, thankful for having all his corn threshed out in one night, replaced the thresher's tattered suit of green by a new one, would disappear for ever, singing,

Pisky new coat and pisky new hood,
Pisky now will do no more good;

or as the Midsummer fires, and the "guary mirkl" (miracle play) in its modernised form of a Christmas mummary. No one now, when afflicted with a plague of fleas and other "small deer," sends (as Polperro folks used to do) the town-crier to a witch's door to shout, "Take back thy flock! Take back thy flock!" And probably very few West Britons now believe in "Parson Dodge," a real man and a "very worthy minister," whose tomb, with the date 1746, is to be seen in Tolland churchyard, but who is, Heaven knows why, both here and about the Lizard, inextricably mixed up with the "Wild Huntsman," of whom from Dartmoor to the Land's End there is in half a dozen slightly different legends a very lively tradition. Why the Reverend Richard Dodge should have become a sort of Michael Scott of West Wales, and should have stepped into all the honours of the prehistoric "Whistman and his wild dogs," it is hard to say; the fact proves that, in Cornwall at any rate, things did not take very long to pass out of history into the mythical stage.

But we mustn't forget Robert Jeffrey, blacksmith and privateersman. It was in 1807 that the privateer, Lord Nelson, sailed from Polperro, and putting into Plymouth for provisions, was boarded by Her Majesty's sloop Recruit, Captain Lake, and deprived of several of her best sailors, Jeffrey among them. Captain Lake was a wild young spark—we can fancy him a little like the noble sailor officers whom Macaulay describes as hectoring over the scurvy-worn seamen of Charles the Second's time. Well, cruising in the Caribbean Sea, he let the water supply run very low. So Jeffrey, thirsty and sulky, got at a barrel of spruce beer kept for the captain's table. "I'll have no thieves on board," said the captain. "Lower the boat instantly! Lieutenant Mould, you see that rock? Man a boat and set the rascal adrift on it." So Jeffrey was landed on his rock, and left there without food—with nothing, in fact, but his

knife, a handkerchief, and a piece of wood which a comrade gave him to signal any passing ship with. The rock, desolate and treeless, had no living thing on it except sea-fowl—no water, no shell-fish. But night was falling when he was left, and he naturally thought the captain was only bent on frightening him, and that they'd fetch him back next morning. What was his horror when at daybreak he saw the *Recruit* disappearing on the horizon? Hunger came on; the sea-birds were far too wary to be caught. To his great joy he found an egg, but it was so rotten that it sickened him. He took to gnawing drift-wood bark; but this, steeped in salt water, made him madly thirsty; and he must have perished but for a timely shower of rain. While he was sucking up the rain-pools through a quill, several ships appeared in the offing, but, though he frantically waved his flag, they all passed him by. He had been on the rock eight days, when the American schooner, *Adams*, came near enough to notice the signal. Jeffrey, so weak that he could scarcely speak, was taken on board, and carried to Marblehead, where he worked at his trade, quite forgetting how anxious they would be on his account at Polperro.

Meanwhile the *Recruit*, leaving Jeffrey on his rock, made for Barbadoes, and joined the squadron under Admiral Sir Alexander Cochrane. But Jack was not likely to leave a messmate in such a fix as that without talking about it. The boat-swain's mate of one ship told the fo'castle men of another, till at last the officers on the flagship heard of it, and then of course the admiral heard the story. Captain Lake was soon sent back, no very gentle language being used to him you may be sure, to pick up the castaway. The printed accounts of "The Wonderful Escape," &c., say it was two months before the *Recruit* got back; but the tradition in Polperro, traced up to an eye-witness, and in itself much more likely, gives the time as not much over a fortnight. Anyhow, Jeffrey was nowhere to be found. The ship stayed three days, though the rock—Sombbrero Island is its grand Spanish name; broad-brimmed hat island, with its central cone and flat low rock all round—might have been overhauled in half an hour. They found a pair of trousers (with somebody else's mark) and an axe handle; that was all. "He's got killed," said one, though by whom appeared uncertain. "He's gone mad through drinking salt water,

and then thrown himself clean into the sea," said another, with a greater eye to probabilities. Others, arguing as if they were living in the days of the buccaneers, "Tell you what, he's been found and murdered by the Spaniards." The admiral, however, set things at rest for the present, by making up his mind that Jeffrey had been picked by some passing vessel. But things did not stop here; men will talk, and, two years after, the story of Jeffrey and his rock was talked of to such purpose, that a court-martial was held on Captain Lake, and he was dismissed the service. Not content with the sentence on the captain, Sir Francis Bardett, then in all his glory, kept worrying the House of Commons till a government order was issued to search for Jeffrey till he was found, or till cause could be shown why it was impossible for him to be found.

They might have been searching till now for anything Jeffrey did to let folks know what had become of him. He was quite content to spend his time between Marblehead and Beverley, Massachusetts, United States, and to bear the nickname of "Governor of Sombbrero." But one George Hassel, seaman, hearing what a fuss was being made, took an affidavit before the Mayor of Liverpool that he had often seen the said Jeffrey, and that at the places aforesaid the manner of his abandonment by the captain of an English sloop of war was quite notorious. Of course the searchers at once got into communication with the Massachusetts authorities; Jeffrey's deposition was taken, and, when called upon to sign it, the man, flurried by the number of gentlefolks about him, had somehow put a cross instead of writing his name, as he usually did, in a fair bold hand. "That's never my son, sure enough," said Widow Jeffrey, when the deposition was shown to her; and her letter to the *Times* (October the 9th, 1809) asserts that "the story has been got up by Captain Lake," why, no one but herself could imagine. The only way to settle the matter was to bring over the supposed Robert Jeffrey and get him identified. As soon as he was found to be the right man, the Admiralty gave him his discharge, and he was taken down to Polperro, where the whole village turned out, with music and tar-barrels, and all signs of rejoicing, to welcome one so strangely rescued. What of Captain Lake? It was soon hinted to the noble family, of which he seems to have been a not very creditable scion, that unless ample compensation was

made, an action would be brought—would it be “for false imprisonment”? So eventually six hundred pounds were paid over to Jeffrey, and with that sum he ought to have become one of the most thriving smiths in the West, or perhaps (as others down there have done with far less capital) to have set up a little iron foundry and made gear for half a dozen mines. But his life abroad had brought out that restlessness which is at the bottom of every Cornishman’s nature. Jeffrey “took the advice of his neighbours,” and went up to London, where the excitement about his “persecution” was still strong, and where some folks were ready to couple together “Lake and tyranny,” and to cry “Liberty and Jeffrey,” as if there had been any connexion between the two. So Jeffrey went on the stage to sing a song or dance a hornpipe. Those were times when a sailor had only to show himself in order to get his fill of honour and all other good things besides; the navy was popular as it has never been since. Much as we love and value our tars, we can hardly realise how much was made of them sixty and seventy years ago, when “the silver streak” was watched daily by thousands of anxious eyes, half expecting to see “Boney’s” flotilla in the offing. So no wonder “Jeffrey the sailor” drew immensely. He made money, going back in a few months to Polperro and buying a coasting schooner. But theatre life is not wholesome for sailors. Jeffrey’s morale (as they call it now) was not improved. His health, too, suffered; and when his coasting vessel went to the bad he fell into a consumption and died, leaving a wife and daughter in great poverty. The story is worth recording, because it shows how, even in those days of very imperfect publicity as compared with the times in which we live, things were generally found out if anybody took the trouble to make noise enough about them. Sir Francis Burdett was a wonderful man to have on your side—keen as a sleuth-hound, tenacious as a bull-dog; and in this case there was political capital to be made out of the affair. “See what our bloated (and Tory) aristocracy is capable of; they’ll not only imprison honest men on land, but they’ll even leave the glorious defenders of our freedom, those sailors to whose heroic devotion we owe our island’s safety, to perish on naked rocks.” One can fancy how the orator would have “sat upon” the whole peerage as aiders and abettors of “this well-born despot.” He got his end; and “the

public,” just then beginning to be rampant, was satisfied, and went and paid its money to see the rescued Jeffrey on the stage. But on the whole I think Jeffrey would have been better at Marblehead. He was ruined, as many a greater man has been, by having greatness thrust upon him. Ask about him if you ever go to Polperro; and if you go there in winter see if you cannot find frog-spawn about New Year’s Day, and vipers and young eels about the month’s end. M. Quetelet, in his *Comparative Temperatures*, says that Nature wakes up there before it does in any other part of Europe. And he bases the statement on a naturalist’s diary kept by the ingenious Mr. Couch, of whom also you will be pretty sure to hear in Polperro.

NIGHT AND MORNING DREAMS.

I WAKE from dreams of the night,
And the stars aloft are coldly gleaming,
My dream is dark and strange with woe;
Oh foolish heart! dost thou not know
The dreams that are dreamed ‘neath the stars’ pale light
Are nought but idle dreaming!

I wake from dreams of the morn,
And the sun on high is shining fairly,
The lark in the blue is singing far,
Seeking in vain for the midnight star,
And buds of the roses newly born
Blush through their dew-drops pearly.

My dream hath fled from the light,
But my heart is warm where its face was shining;
Oh happy heart! thou knowest well
What the morning dream doth sure foretell,
Thine onward path will be glad and bright,
Arise! and forswear repining!

MODERN ROMAN MOSAICS.

A TALKING HOUSE.

WE are in a great hall with a domed roof. The hall is semicircular in shape; a great arc, of which the chord is formed by a long raised platform approached by steps on either side, and (behind and above the platform) open galleries. Opposite to the platform, and separated from it by a considerable space of carpeted floor, are rows of stalls rising amphitheatrically one above the other. The stalls are divided into blocks, between which run passages of steps, spreading like rays towards the outer edge of the semicircle, where in the lofty wall are doors of egress and ingress leading into a corridor. High above these again are other open galleries curving round from horn to horn of the crescent.

Hats off! Look, listen, and say nothing. This is the honourable assemblage of legislators—the elect of the nation—the parliament of the kingdom of Italy now sitting in high deliberation upon matters

important to the common weal. And although this be a Talking House, the talking is not to be done by you and me.

Let us look around us. We are in the "Aula della Presidenza," a gallery just in the centre of the chord of the arc, and immediately above and behind the presidential chair, and are thus well placed for seeing the whole hall. We have gained admission to the Aula della Presidenza by the good offices of an honourable member, whom we are fortunate enough to count among our friends. Fronting us, tier upon tier, rise the stalls of the deputies. Above them again are the galleries for the accommodation of the general public. On the left is the compartment for the ladies; on the right that for the members of the public press. The centre of the curving gallery is open to all his majesty's lieges. There is ample room. There are plenty of seats. There are no concealing gratings or wickets. Only—only the persons in the centre of the public gallery can see nothing but the backs of their honourable representatives, and will be, in all probability, unable to distinguish one word in twenty that is said. For the Chamber has grave acoustic defects, and there is no part of it where it is easy to hear the orators.

The whole place is handsomely appointed. The pillars springing from the galleries, which support the roof, are adorned with shields blazoned with the arms of the principal Italian cities. The stalls of the deputies are cushioned with dark blue velvet. In front of each one is a desk with writing materials, and a drawer for holding papers. The carpet is blue and stone colour in a rich pattern. The president's seat (equivalent to our Speaker's chair), which occupies the middle of the raised platform, is of blue velvet and gilding. In front of it is a table, also covered with blue velvet, whereon are disposed numerous documents, printed and written; inkstands on a massive scale, pens, wax, and pounce; a salver with a huge water bottle and goblet, and a basin full of powdered sugar; and lastly, a great silver hand-bell, almost as big as the bell of an English town-crier. This hand-bell plays a distinguished part in the proceedings of the Italian parliament, and is by no means placed on the president's table merely pro forma, as we shall by-and-bye be assured of.

Right and left of the president are tables for his secretaries and the quaestors of the Chamber, all upon the raised platform. In front of the platform, on the

floor of the house, is a long narrow table—adorned and covered similarly to the presidential table, minus the hand-bell—with nine chairs disposed along it so that their occupants shall all sit at one side of the table facing the deputies, and with their backs to the president; and this is the place of the ministers of the crown. Opposite to them is a curved table following the line of the semicircle, and here sit the members of the "Commissione," a sort of committee to whom bills are referred for revision, and in order to obtain any suggestions or improvements which the honourable Commissione may be able to offer thereupon.

And now it is two o'clock in the afternoon, and the sitting begins to be animated and interesting. Look at the amphitheatre before us. It is peopled with a large gathering of honourable members. The number of "collegi elettorali," or places which return members to the Italian parliament, is five hundred and eight; the actual number of members who ought to have been in their places during the present session is four hundred and thirty-five; and the legal number required to make a house is two hundred and eighteen. It is very seldom that that number is much exceeded. Sometimes it is not even reached, and then of course there can be no debate. But to-day there are more than four hundred members present: for to-day we are to have an important struggle, and an eager debate, on the result of which it is possible that ministers may go out. The question to be discussed may be briefly stated here, although reams of writing and floods of talk have been expended upon it "in another place." It is simply this: are we (Italians) to abolish the "case generalizie," or head-quarters of the generals of the various religious orders in Rome at one sweep, ruthlessly and absolutely; or are we, taking into consideration the peculiar circumstances of the case, to make provision for the maintenance of these said generals out of the revenues of the suppressed ecclesiastical corporations, and permit the present generals to inhabit their old quarters during the remainder of their lives?

To this question the Right, or ministerial party answer, yes; the Left, or opposition, no. And there is to be a battle.

The house is full of a half-subdued excitement, which ever and anon breaks forth in a burst of loud talking, which drowns any single voice. The amphi-

theatre of stalls looks like a kind of drawing-room Coliseum, fitted up with French upholstery, and seen through a diminishing glass. Come what may, we are sure that the gladiators who do battle there, however pathetically they may raise their glance to catch the eye of the president, will not need to exclaim, "Hail, Biancheri! Those about to die salute thee!" The worst that can happen will be a change of places. And if that should come to pass, no doubt ministers will vacate their thorny posts of honour with due resignation and—I had almost written dignity. But to say the honest truth, dignity—at least in aspect and bearing—is not a marked characteristic of the present Italian cabinet.

There sits Quintino Sella, minister of finance, on the whole, perhaps, the most intelligent-looking of those at the ministerial table. He has a square, powerful head and face, surmounted by a crop of thick brown hair, with a dull copper-coloured tint in it here and there, arranged *à la* scrubbing-brush. He is carelessly, almost shabbily, dressed, and altogether looks like a resolute, earnest man, who has a "power" of work in him. Near to him lounges Visconti-Venosta, minister for foreign affairs, who is tall and bearded, and wears a well-fitting frock-coat buttoned across the chest, and has altogether more the air of an aristocrat, as we English understand such matters, than any of his colleagues. To them comes in our prime minister, Lanza, who holds the portfolio of the interior. The prime minister is rather ungainly in his actions. He has a bald head, with a strip of black hair going oddly across it like a ribbon, and a heavy, sun-burned face. Altogether his bearing is rustic, and seems to belong rather to the provincial country doctor, which he was, than to the prime minister of a great nation, which he is. Lanza has a reputation for uttering famous "bulls," and certainly does not shine as a speaker.

The heads which fill the amphitheatre of stalls, each appearing on the blue velvet background behind his own desk, belong mostly to men past middle life. A large proportion of them are bald. There is nothing striking about the physiognomies in general. You may see a collection of such in any café, piazza, or theatre, where the respectable class of citizens congregate, anywhere, in short, except in church. Nor, except that they are much darker-skinned, do they differ much in appearance from an assemblage of British bourgeois. There

are, of course, notable exceptions. And, oddly enough, I think it would be found that these exceptions are mainly, if not wholly, to be found on the left of the Chamber. Here are more picturesque, singular, and what we should call foreign-looking faces than among their adversaries of the right. The Left displays decidedly more beard, more individuality, more Bohemianism of attire, and less shirt-front than its opposite neighbour. Which is cause and which effect—whether a hairy, flashing-eyed, eccentrically-dressed individual gravitates towards the opposition by some inherent qualities of his nature, or whether, having deliberately adopted the principles of the opposition, he thereupon becomes hairy, flashing-eyed, and eccentric in his garb through some subtle process of assimilation—I leave to some German philosopher to decide.

One characteristic Right and Left have in common; a copious use of gesticulation, namely, to enforce and illustrate their speech. No two deputies can chat together for five minutes without our seeing hands raised in the air with rapidly-moving fingers. Indeed, this play of eloquent hands is so universal all over the Chamber, that if you stopped your ears you might imagine yourself assisting at a séance of deaf mutes. The hands flutter and open, and shake themselves, and double themselves up, leaving only an up-turned thumb sticking out argumentatively, and are clasped together, and separated, and raised, with open palm and widely-stretched-out fingers, or are flung out disdainfully with the back of the hand to the spectator, in wonderful variety and expressiveness of movement. I have heard this flexible pantomime admired by foreigners, and our insular comparative immobility objected to. Certainly one can hardly conceive the spectacle of the British House of Commons dappled all over with raised fluttering hands, like a flock of grotesque birds. But perhaps we may be reconciled to such loss of the picturesque and dramatic as is involved in this fact by remembering that one may express a great many emotions in pantomime, but very few thoughts.

During the whole sitting, servants, dressed in plain black clothes, and wearing a scarf of the Italian tricolour round the left arm, pass backwards and forwards, up and down, hither and thither, along the gangways between the blocks of stalls. They carry notes, and cards, and messages

to and from the deputies. And every now and then a man in livery, with knee-breeches and silk stockings, appears, bearing a great salver, whereon are a decanter full of cold water, a goblet, and a silver basin full of powdered sugar. This he deposits on the desk of any honourable member who is about to address the house. For no man would think of attempting to make a speech without having within reach the refreshment of a copious draught of sugar and water. It is a little comic to observe the invariable routine. The speaker always has a friend at hand, who prepares the beverage for him and hands him the brimming goblet as he may need it. Many orators ask for intervals of rest in the course of a long speech, which are always accorded by the house, and thus fight their parliamentary battle in a series of "rounds," accepting the assistance of their backers in the shape of sugar and water (or, in extreme cases, a little syrup, or even a dash of marsala in the water), and coming up to time again with a fresh burst of eloquence.

Now rises General Corte to interrogate the president as to why his (Corte's) amendment has not yet been printed. The Chamber is not interested in General Corte's amendment, and breaks out into a veritable clamour of talking and laughing, and loud exclamations of "Basta, basta!" (That's enough!). Upon this the great silver hand-bell comes into play. The honourable Biancheri, President of the Chamber, rings violently for silence, all the while apostrophising the deputies in a loud scolding voice. He absolutely rates honourable gentlemen as though they were naughty school-boys, and is sometimes unable to restore sufficient quiet for the orators to be heard under the threat (uttered in an "if-you're-not-good-this-very-minute-you-shall-be-whipped-and-sent-to-bed" kind of tone) of suspending the sitting altogether.

As the debate waxes hotter and hotter the silver hand-bell has a hard time of it. And as to Signor Biancheri, he is as hoarse as a provincial actor after the third act of a melodrama. Now rises Ferracciù, member for Orvieto, and makes a severe speech against the ministerial propositions. The honourable gentleman has a keen countenance, a little vulpine, perhaps, but not in a bad sense, and considerable powers of facial expression. Especially he is able to express sarcasm and irony, with a subtle play of the mouth. But, alas! not only his voice is feeble, but he has a fatal habit

of dropping it at the end of his sentences, and thus depriving his hearers of the very point and sting of his epigrams. It is at once ludicrous and irritating to see that sarcastic mouth uttering, with evident relish, some culminating phrase of which you do not hear one word, whilst all the rest of the sentence, leading up to the climax, has been perfectly audible.

To him succeeds Zanardelli, of Brescia, member for Isco, and pours forth a fiery protest on the same side, swinging his arms violently, and getting himself into a condition to require several "goes" of sugar-and-water during the utterance of his speech. The honourable Zanardelli touches a patriotic chord in the breasts of myself and my companion, when he gives utterance to the venerable and time-worn quotation "*Timeo Danaos et dona ferentes.*" We feel that Italy must now indeed be admitted to be a constitutional country, with parliamentary institutions of the most approved pattern!

The Chamber becomes more and more agitated. Lanza rises to speak, but is rendered absolutely inaudible by the increasing hubbub. Nobody listens to him. Everybody talks at once. And the president, who is seen to be roaring at the full pitch of his lungs, performs a triple bob major on the silver hand-bell! The subject has been sufficiently discussed in the opinion of the house, and members are impatient to come to a vote. But even at this moment of excitement, the house subsides into silence to listen to the speech of Baron Bettino Ricasoli, who rises on the right, and makes a brief discourse in favour of ministers. The old Tuscan is lean, tough, and brown. His clean-shaven face expresses practical sense, courage, and a certain dry pungency inclining to bitterness. He is a man to whom one would be shy of appealing on any grounds of exalted sentiment; but who is probably conscientiously convinced that honesty is the best policy, and who would certainly perceive and acknowledge that two and two make four, even though his enemy should say so—a rarer merit in Italy than you perhaps wot of, good reader. He speaks briefly, and to the point, in favour of leaving the generals of the orders undisturbed in their present quarters during the remainder of their lives, and his speech practically closes the debate.

Then comes the vote by apello nominale, that is to say, one of the secretaries of

the house reads aloud all the names of the deputies in alphabetical order from the presidential platform, and each man as he is called answers "si" or "no," according as his vote goes, from his place in the Chamber. This is a long process, but it is accomplished at length. Singular it is to hear the various tones—bold, indifferent, trifling, eager, defiant, shrill, harsh, musical, deep, soft, or sharp—in which the si's and no's come dropping in from the different parts of the Chamber, like a straggling fire of musketry, with here and there a blank cartridge when a member does not answer to his name at all.

And now when the list is all gone through, and whilst the secretaries are reckoning up the votes (which they do with incredible slowness), the deputies leave their stalls, and throng on to the floor of the house, chattering and gesticulating in noisy groups. Almost all are talking, and arguing, and jeering at, or denouncing their political adversaries' line of conduct—almost all, but not quite. One member remains in his stall constant to the occupation which has absorbed his faculties from the very beginning of the sitting—nearly seven mortal hours ago—to the present time, namely, the writing of letters! He must have written nearly a dozen, first and last, such has been his diligence. He barely responded to the calling of his name during the voting, and answered like a man who is vexatiously interrupted in the real and important business of the day. Now, whilst his colleagues are discussing the bill on the "case generalizie," he sits aloft in his place on one of the top benches, reading his letters aloud to himself with appropriate action! We cannot hear his voice, but we can see his lips move, and his hands wave up and down. It is to be hoped that his constituents will be as satisfied as his correspondents ought to be with the result of his day's labour.

Hush! Silence there! The numbers are at length added up, the result of the vote is about to be announced by the president. There is a stir, a turning of heads, a cessation of talk in the groups on the floor, as Biancheri reads aloud from a paper in his hand the following figures:

"Present, four hundred and fourteen members. Voted for Ricasoli's order of the day, two hundred and twenty; against it, one hundred and ninety-three; abstained from voting, one. Majority in favour of the bill, twenty-seven."

So it is over. The aged men who rule over the cowed army may remain in their old places until Death shall call their names on his apello nominale, to which there is no refusing to answer. The religious corporations are virtually abolished, and we have heard the decree which abolishes them made by a constitutional parliament in the city of Rome, capital of the kingdom of Italy. Strange times, my masters!

I wonder what the sneering monk at the Cappuccini thinks of it all.* I wonder so much that I am tempted out of my due course homeward through the sweet evening air, to look in at the grated window, through which I can see the silent conclave, motionless in their crumbling brown garments. A ray of silver moonlight streams through the bars and falls on the opposite wall. There is the mocking one, his forehead shadowed blackly, and his hideous jaws grinning in furtive derision. "Ho, ho! Your fine parliament," he seems to say, "is a mere puppet-show, a sound and fury, signifying nothing. Look at those yellow bones, that fleshless skull. A nimble tongue once wagged in that, too. But all his paters and aves didn't save him from coming to be like me. And neither will their prate of patriotism save your parliament men from the same fate. How I mock at it all, here in this cool charnel-house, and turn my head away from the crucifix they have vainly thrust into my hand!"

Oh, but you are ghastly and horrible in the moonlight, you sneering sinner! Let us look upon your neighbour, the old man who died over a century ago. Ah, he lies peacefully with closed eyes, and one could almost believe that he has turned over a little on his side since the morning. What is it that seems to sound from *his* slumbering mouth? "We are all frail and fallible, brothers," he murmurs, placidly, "but God is above all. If you do your duty as best you can, and stick loyally to your colours, and serve your best in the army you belong to, be it civil, military, or ecclesiastic, you may hope for an honourable mention in the last great order of the day. The captain up above there arranges the battle. We see it piece-meal, and have only to obey orders, each according to his conscience. Let us be kindly and simple, and brave and humble, and then, when the Talking House and the Silent House have both come to an end, we may stand side by

* See ALL THE YEAR ROUND, New Series, vol. x. p. 438.

side in the common brotherhood of humanity. And meanwhile, good night; peace be with you!"

OBSTACLES.

THERE was a wholesome moral, rely on it, underlying the brisk narrative of that old fairy tale of the adventurous knight who sought to fill a pitcher at the enchanted fountain. As he climbed the hill, on the crest of which the wondrous water bubbled up, strange voices assailed his ear. There were the fierce threats of bitter foes, the roar of a raging crowd, the soft blandishments of gentle and upbraiding love. Yet the good knight pressed steadily on to the goal, while all around him cropped out in ghastly profusion from the fatal soil a number of tall black stones, representatives of fainthearted aspirants who had turned their heads, and had been petrified as a punishment. Every day's experience confirms the truth of the allegory. For obstacles are of two sorts, the soft and the hard, and of these, perhaps, the former, like sunken rocks in a ship's course, are the most dangerous.

The more familiar class of obstacles are solid stumbling-blocks, real, tangible barriers that proclaim "no thoroughfare," in unmistakable language, and that must be scaled by the daring, or hewn down by the strong. Sometimes these hindrances bar the way, not of an individual, but of a people. We see nations which seem from the outset to be too heavily weighted for the race of life. The Thibetian, cowering among rocks to escape the biting wind, can scarcely be blamed if the nineteenth century finds him as he was ages ago. A climate of imperious cold, a stony soil, a girdling wall of sky-piercing mountains, no roads, and it may almost be said no fuel, unite to keep Thibet the land of hunger and emptiness which it has ever been. The Icelandic, who cannot afford fire except for cooking, and whose winter fare is an unwholesome diet of wind-dried fish and ill-fed pork, has positively retrograded since the days when his ancestors colonised Greenland. The old insular Scandinavians owned forests long since devoured by the lava of the giant volcanoes; their cattle grazed over many a square mile of pasture that is now but a cinder-strewn desert, for Nature herself appears to have served her writ of ejectment on the dwindling population. There are other doomed tribes whose sum-total yearly lessens. The Esquimaux,

whose national life has been one long struggle with frost and starvation, are dying out, slowly but surely, like one of their own skull-lamps when the seal-oil runs dry. Maori and Hottentot, the black race of Australasia, and the red race of America, wane with startling rapidity. The Polynesian islanders were diminishing in numbers, even before Cook first sighted their bread-fruit groves and coral reefs, and their decadence has been, as usual, the quicker for the white man's visits. War and drought and slave-hunts are telling fast on the census of pagan Africa, and of all non-European races only those of China and Japan appear to retain their sturdy vitality.

Material obstacles, if not absolutely overwhelming, are precisely those which a vigorous nation confronts the best. Even here in England, a feebler stock than our own would hardly have crowded a forest of masts into their ports, or encumbered their wharves with heaped-up merchandise from every quarter of the globe. Our soil and climate do not enable us to dispense with skill and care. We must farm well, and make our coal and iron do us yeoman's service, and plough every sea with the keels of our trading-ships, if we would keep our place among nations. What is true of England may safely be said of more countries than one. Every hay-crop raised in Holland, every shipload of Frison cheese, or Guelders butter, represents a triumph of unflagging industry and dogged courage. Those who redeemed their country from the waves of the North Sea were surely competent to make the most of its resources, and the same may in a less degree be said of Flanders and the spade-husbandry that has turned a barren bed of sea-sand into a huge market-garden. The Rhenish vineyards are ugly when compared to those Tuscan enclosures where the graceful vines form fantastic arches from tree to tree, and where the heavy purple grape-bunches hang mixed with apple and plum, pear and chestnut, one tangle of variegated green and ripening fruit. But in Rhineland each terraced ledge that lines the tall river-cliff has been painfully won by hard work. It was no light labour to level those shelves of solid rock, to plant that system of ladders heedfully pinned to the crag-front, to carry up by basketfuls the very earth that should nourish the tender roots of the young vines, and to tend them in all weathers, jealously watching over every nursing shoot, and setting a nightly guard

to secure the maturing clusters from thieves, biped and four-footed. Here is no instance of nature's lavish bounty, but of a valuable crop reared by incessant and self-denying toil.

The instinctive ambition to rise in life, the desire of almost every man to better his worldly condition, have been viewed by many legislators rather as noxious weeds to be discouraged in their growth, than as the germs of future excellence and improvement. It is curious to mark how often efforts have been made to draw a hard and fast line that should never be transgressed, and to stereotype the position of different ranks in society. We may safely say that the lawgivers of Peru had never heard of Lycurgus, and that the heirs of the Peruvian Romulus or Cecrops, Manco Capac, were by no means cognisant of the laws of Menu. Yet they strove, and not unsuccessfully, to do what Dorian and Brahmin had done, and to crystallise a kingdom into an unchanging solid. There was the heaven-descended emperor, fit compeer of Ninus and Belshazzar, of Numa and of Ella, deriving much of his authority from his semi-divine ancestry, as Semiramis and Cheops had done. There were the priests, white-robed, burning incense to a Transatlantic Mithra, in temples more gorgeous with gold than those of the sun-worshippers of that Persia whose rites bore some resemblance to theirs. There were the great caciques, like so many provincial satraps of Xerxes or Darius, the minor nobles, who furnished the flower of the Inca's army, and the mass of the people, whose duty it was to work and obey. Here were none of the usual incidents of oppression. Compared with the serfs of feudal Europe, the peons of Peru had little to complain of. Poverty was unknown. The task exacted from each worker in the human hive was not excessive. All were fairly well fed, lodged, and clad; nor does there seem to have prevailed any of that capricious cruelty that blots the pages of ordinary mediæval history. But if there was little fear, there was no hope. Merit could not win promotion. The peasant must live and die in his original station, whatever his qualities or his claims. There was a dull dead level of enforced mediocrity which the bulk of the nation might not pass, and hence the ease with which the empire fell before the Spanish sword. The glittering image rested but on feet of clay.

India and China, unlike in most respects,

are at opposite poles as regards their social discipline. Labour, despised in India, receives high honour in the Flowery Land, where the deified emperor yearly puts his sacred hands to the plough. With an aristocracy of double-firsts and senior wranglers, with poets, judges, and philosophic viceroys, the Central Kingdom makes well-nigh all prizes the rewards of competitive examination. Chinese candidates are not hampered by nominations or by a stern limit of age. It is not only a lad of eighteen who may break a lance in that intellectual arena. Many an elderly-young man, often plucked, gets his pass at last, and wears the button of the lowest rank of mandarin. One or two degraded classes are supposed to be inadmissible, just as Cagots or lepers would have been hooted out of court during the feudal rule. But mere poverty and obscurity cannot keep a bright boy back from winning the blue ribbon of official Kathay. There are good schools to which the humblest have access; and the system of coaching and cramming is as well kept up, and far more cheaply, than with us.

Very great are the temptations to Ching and Chang, quick-witted urchins as they are, to stick sedulously to their books, and to invest their pocket-money, not in kites and candy, but in feeing some needy graduate to teach them how to paint courtly verses on vermilion paper. There is something deserving of sympathy in one part of a Chinaman's ambition. Should he rise in life his forefathers will be ennobled, and he will have the satisfaction, very dear to him, of burning incense and gilt joss-sticks before costly altars dedicated to his ancestors. But, independent of this back-handed fashion of founding a family, Ching and Chang have motives less sentimentally respectable. Familiar from infancy with the extortions and frauds by which the chief mandarins swell a moderate salary into an enormous fortune, these pig-tailed young aspirants cherish no fonder wish than to be taken up among the privileged, so that they—even they—may “squeeze” provinces, and tax merchants at their will. The prodigal splendour, the griping greed of the literary aristocracy, are tolerantly viewed by those in whose eyes it is the merest matter of course that persons in authority should play the part of King Stork, and who hope some day to see some nephew or grandson take his degree and enrich his relatives. Meanwhile, there are other channels for the nation's

activity than agriculture or government employ. Commerce is widespread and lucrative, capital abounds; and there are many very wealthy families, dwelling in palaces, with parks around them, that in cost and care may vie with any pleasure in Europe, who are content with the enjoyment of ample means, and seldom send their youths to compete for the peacocks' plumes and gold and silver embroidery of a mandarin.

Far different is, or was, the imposing structure of Hindoo society. The most elaborate precautions were in India adopted to keep every layer of the community in its due position. There were the hereditary kings, now extinct. There were the members of the sacerdotal caste, depositaries of all wisdom, holiness, and civil influence. There was the order of military nobles, ranging from the vassal princes and great feudatories to the rustic lord of some half-dozen ploughs, each and all of whom were expected to keep their sharp swords ready for the slaughter of the outside heathen. There were merchants and bankers, hereditary barbers and sweepers, village headmen of long descent, immemorial watchmen and perpetual shawl-weavers. From the rajah to the washerman, each Hindoo had his allotted station, his duties, and his right. The accident of birth determined for him who should be his companions, what his pursuits, how he should live, from the cradle to the funeral pile. The immense servile class, on the labour of which this vast political structure was reared, was, in theory at least, utterly shut out from promotion, and dead to hope. This state policy, however, sorely breached by the Mahomedan conquest, was subjected to a new influence when the growth of the English power made itself felt in the peninsula. Savajee, son of a slipper-bearer, could set in motion more Mahratta squadrons than obeyed the Peishwa himself. Sudra ministers, Sudra governors, have been known to give their orders to Brahmin butlers and high-caste cooks. In India, as elsewhere, a hard head or a heavy purse won consideration for him who owned it, and the possessors of wealth or power became the patrons of those whose sole claim to notice was based on pedigree.

In Europe, whether Pagan or Christian, the spirit of the laws was less opposed to the individual's free passage from one condition to another than was its letter. The slave, in an Athenian's eyes, was not much above the present status of the gorilla, but he put on full humanity when set at

liberty. A Roman freedman was not the equal of a born Quirite, and more than one constitutional victory had to be won before a plebeian general could command an army, or an Italian ally claim citizenship. But this was merely due to the selfish desire of the possessors of good things to keep what they had got, and, certainly, not to any abstract abhorrence of change. Rome was a close corporation. Its patrician families formed a select club. It was not in human nature that they should be very eager to admit outsiders to share privileges which lessened in value as they became diffused. In the Christendom of the Middle Ages the main impediments in the path of him who sought to rise, in peaceful fashion at least, were due to some such jealousy as this. The guilds of merchants and of craftsmen were chary of welcoming a novice, and ready to buzz and sting, like angry wasps, if an imprudent competitor essayed to undersell them or outdo them. The schoolmen were too jealous of a too lucid theologian, the physicians of a doctor who presumed to cure what Galen had deemed beyond remedy. It was not easy, before the printing-press cheapened learning, to gather book-lore. Manuscript works of any merit were incredibly scarce and dear, and the possessors grudged a loan of them to their best friends, if residing at a distance. To dive into the arcana of natural science was harder still; all chemicals and apparatus being extravagantly dear and difficult of transport, while the student who collected a few retorts and alembics ran great risk of being pelted and misused for his devotion to the Black Art; and might, very possibly, expiate his over-familiarity with evil-smelling and explosive compounds by fine and imprisonment. For merit of a warlike order there was always a brisk demand, before gunpowder and standing armies combined to render soldiery the cheapest, instead of the dearest, of commodities. A feudal army, with its tumultuary levy, bound to give six weeks' service, was so awkward an instrument, that any valiant man, with strong muscles and tolerable brains, could make a fair livelihood of professional war. A trained cross-bowman, a skilled archer, a man-at-arms, who was thoroughly at home in his steel-plated war-saddle, could earn a competence, with considerable probabilities of plunder and ransom. Louis the Twelfth of France remunerated the heavy-armed horsemen of his gendarmerie at the munificent rate of seven shillings and sixpence per day, and this at a time when money was nearly

ten times as valuable as it now is. Our own Charles the Second allowed his life-guardsmen to draw pay equal in amount to that of a subaltern of the present day, and, of course, endowed with far greater purchasing power.

If the fighting man of the Middle Ages had any ambition beyond the attainment of creature comforts, its gratification depended very much on his own thews and sinews and fearless heart. Modern battles do not afford such a stage for the display of personal prowess as did the *melee* of the old days of hand-blows. Nobody knows whose rifle does execution on the enemy, and Hans, who has hurt nobody, perhaps receives the corporal's worsted stripes, that would have been better bestowed on the fatal sharpshooter Fritz. But there was no doubt about the man who hewed a road through the spear-hedges about him, beneath whose mace the hostile standard-bearer sank, or who brought in the rebel leader, unhorsed and unhelmed. To do justice to the sovereigns of the period, they were prompt to reward service such as this, nor did any prejudice against humble birth or rough manners cast a cold shade over the hero of the hour. Quick! the gold spurs and the knightly belt; clash, with steely clang down comes the accolade from the royal sword on the mailed shoulder of the champion; and as plain Dick of a minute since, Sir Richard now, rises from his kneeling posture on the crimsoned turf, strong hands are offered to his grasp, and friendly voices hail as a brother the new-made chevalier. The herald, who is devising a bearing for his shield, will charge him no fees for this exercise of his skill in blazonry; the pages at the king's banquet will serve him with as courteous attention as if he were a mighty baron instead of a landless banneret—not that he will be landless long, for the sovereign is guardian of many a rich heiress, and will find a well-dowered bride for Sir Richard, if he do but fight on as he has fought to-day.

The revival of learning did much to smooth the path for those who preferred to carve out their own fortunes otherwise than with sword and the battle-axe. Cæsar then thought it no shame to pick up the maul-stick of a painter. Purbblind scholars, better used to palimpsests and mouldering parchments than to the ways of flesh-and-blood contemporaries, suddenly found themselves the petted oracles of enthusiastic princesses and maids of honour. It was more profitable to pen a copy of verses, and sing

them afterwards to some stringed instrument, than to overthrow a stalwart antagonist in the tilting-ring. Sorely did the big-boned, dull-witted cavaliers, who were fit for nothing but fighting, mourn that they knew no Latin, and could not, for their lives, turn a tune or put two rhymes together. And so we gradually reached the reigns of the last Valois and the two first Louises of the Bourbon line, when to write poetry was to be entitled to state pensions and sinecures, when a duke could hardly dispense with literary claims to distinction, and when a smart repartee, uttered within earshot of royalty, proved a goldmine to the utterer. Art, when once discriminating eyes were on the look out for its Avatar, was pretty sure to force its way to the front. No doubt but that exceptional good-luck befel that young Italian shepherd who, chalking his crude conceptions on the walls near which his flock fed, attracted the notice of a wealthy patron riding by, and so was spirited away to school, to the studio, and immortal renown. But when all pictorial power was rare and new, a lad with a great aptitude for drawing was likely to become the brag and marvel of the country-side, and through a probation of sign-boards to pass to the capital, present recompense, and future fame. More than one solemn impostor, more than one boisterous charlatan, sat at meat at that feast which prince and people designed to spread for the witty, the industrious, and the wise. But in the Renaissance itself, with its tender love of the poor student, its fostering care for budding genius, and its deliberate preference of refinement and reason to the old brutal standard of sheer violence, there was surely something touching as well as generous.

To rise, in the worldliest sense of the word, to attain to opulence and high station from the very bottom of the social ladder, is a feat hard to be performed, but which hundreds and thousands of financial acrobats have achieved with clean hands and a conscience of more than average purity. Unwearying patience, sublime self-denial, sound mother-wit, and a healthy capacity for work, are needed to push the climber of the slippery lower steps. Clear eyesight and a head that is not giddy at great heights do the rest. Every London prentice had not the chance, like the ancestor of the Osbornes, of leaping from the parapet of the bridge to the rescue of his master's daughter. It is a pity to think that dear Dick Whittington never slept under a waggon-tilt, or trudged penniless along the

dusty road leading to the wonderful city that was paved with gold. Thrice lord mayor he was, and a civic Croesus, whatever his mythical connexion with the cat, which some mediæval sculptor insisted on placing in the arms of his stone effigy; but it is to be feared that he rode up from Gloucestershire on a shaggy hackney, like any other freeholder's son, and only swept a shop as a necessary incident of his novitiate. There may have been clerks as intuitively thrifty as the quondam millionaire, Jacques Lafitte. It was well for him that when he picked up, out of innate carefulness, the pin that lay on the counting-house floor of that rich banker, who had just refused to employ the clumsy, hungry, country lad, such sharp eyes were upon him as those of the shrewd man of business who called him back to a desk and fortune. Sooner or later, however, work that is at once hard and intelligent, if not overweighted by some remarkable counterpoise in the disposition of the worker, does make its way.

One series of obstacles, more formidable to many of us than poverty, than ignorance, or ill-health, or the dull opposition of the slow-witted enemies of change, remains to be noted. There was truth in the old Æsopian fable of the traveller who wrapped his cloak the tighter round him for all the stormy wrath of rain and wind, but who flung it from his shoulders at the first kiss of the warm sunshine. Ease, comfort, indolence, are the rust and mildew of many a noble nature, and that man is strong, indeed, who always resists the Mephistophelian whisper that it is better to put off till to-morrow what may as well be done then, or any day. To enable us to overcome obstacles of this insidious species, even misfortune often proves a serviceable stimulant, and more than one winner of the world's prizes has lived to bless the day when the shock of some apparent calamity nerved him, at the pressure of need, to bring forth the talent that otherwise might have lain in the napkin, unheeded, until the final reckoning.

NO ALTERNATIVE.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "DENIS DONNE," &c.

CHAPTER XII. BY THE LEETH FOR THE SECOND TIME.

WHEN Harty put her head down on the pillow that night it was with an insane wish that she might never lift it up again—never be called upon to front the confusion that she had brought upon herself.

"You must write to Claude to-morrow; you must write yourself, Harty," her mother had said to her, unconsciously sharpening the dagger that was being pressed home to Harty's heart by calling him "Claude," with the familiar intonation of old days.

There was fever in her heart, and fire in her brain, as she lay there tossing through the long watches of the night. The words, "You must write to Claude to-morrow; you must write to him yourself," repeated themselves with every variety of emphasis. What language could supply her with words, in which she should make known to him what she was, whom he had loved so well and long? "I wish I had died before I had loved another man," she thought, as many another woman has thought before her; "I wish I had been too old to care for Jack Ferrier, or to be cared for by him before ever he came across my path; I wish there was no such thing as love in the world; and I must write to Claude to-morrow."

In imagination she wrote at least fifty letters, wording the shameful truth to him in fifty different ways. She could not forget herself and the agony of her position for a moment. Even sleep shunned her as being "too base for its balmy, peaceful companionship," she told herself bitterly, and believed herself for the time.

There was no comfort for her, the poor hopeless, frightened little sinner, in the thought of the man she had promised to marry this last evening. Was he not the friend who was dear even as a brother to Claude Powers? What if she were the cause of the seeds of disunion being sown between these two friends, who had never been estranged before? What if Claude should condemn and denounce her as a perfidious light-loving woman whom no man should trust? What if she were branded by him as a jilt, a worthless, easily won and lost creature, who would make the race of life a losing one for the man who won her? What if all these things should be heaped in fact and in prophecy upon her humbled head, directly Claude received that letter which she must write to him to-morrow? How long the hours of the night were as she tossed through them whenever her mind drifted away from the unavoidable letter to the other points of the wretched case! How they seemed to speed when she thought of the truth her pen must trace in the morning. How should she ever write down the words of shame that would proclaim

her fickleness and frailty of purpose to Claude Powers.

The morning came at last, and with it came Mabel, full of inquiry and surmise, and with just an irritatingly slight tinge of condemnation in her manner. "I'm sure I wish you happiness with all my heart," she said, "but you'll live to repent it; how you could ever look at him after Claude, much more love him, is wonderful to me."

"I looked at him because he was right before me to be looked at, and I loved him for the same reason I suppose," Harty answered, curtly; "it's useless your wondering about the reason why, Mab."

"It will be an awful blow to Claude," Mabel moaned on, the tears welling up into her eyes as she spoke; "his own friend too, the dearest friend he has. Oh, Harty, have you weighed the consequences well? it's not a light thing to embitter a man's whole life for a fancy."

"It's such a heavy thing, that it's crushing the life out of my heart," Harty said, and her face was pitifully ghastly with pallor and with pain. "Weighed the consequences? Well, no, I never thought of them until it had all gone too far, Mab. I wish I had died while I loved Claude better than all the world; I wish I had died faithful to him; but nothing I can do now can bring back the reality, and I can't sham—"

"Perhaps if Mr. Ferrier went away," Mabel interrupted, timidly, "your fancy for him would probably soon die out, and Claude would know nothing about it, and—"

"I should be a liar to both men," Harty cried out, sharply. "What do you think I'm made of, to love and unlove backwards and forwards in that way?"

"Anything would be better than hurting Claude as you will hurt him if you marry Mr. Ferrier," Mabel pleaded eagerly. "I'm sure when I think of how he will look at you if he ever sees you after he knows it, I wouldn't be you for the world. Harty, he's so much better and cleverer than anybody else. You'll hate yourself by-and-bye for having left him. You'll blame yourself—"

"Don't," Harty broke in, impetuously. "I hate myself and blame myself already, and what good does my self-hate and blame do? I must go on, I tell you, now. Probably he knows it by this time, and is despising me as he can despise a woman who falls short of what she ought to be. The less we talk about Claude the better, Mab." And then she stopped abruptly,

crying tempestuously, for she remembered how desperately she had loved Claude Powers once.

A mountain of self-reproach and self-contempt weighed down upon her pen and mind when, at length, she got herself to her desk, and strove to write the words to Claude which should show her to him as she really was. She wrote, and destroyed, letter after letter, and at last dashed off the wretched truth in these words:

"Forgive me, and forget me. I have promised to marry Mr. Ferrier."

Only those who have sinned and suffered in the same way can realise the paroxysm of rage and shame which possessed her as she compelled herself to write this. Of rage against the circumstances which had led her along. Of shame that she should have been weak and wicked enough to be led by them. The feeble, commonplace, conventional remonstrances which Mabel had uttered to her rang in her ears as if they had been wise words of doom. "It's not a light thing to embitter a man's whole life for a fancy." The words danced before her eyes in characters of fire, pointing the way to a long vista of remorse and misery.

She despatched her note by a messenger, and then sat down to wait for the next blow—his answer to it. But her messenger passed his on the way, and before Claude heard from her she received this one line from him:

"Is it true? Answer, yes or no."

In the utter abandonment of her desperation she wrote back:

"It is true. And if I had a daughter I'd rather see her dead than see her what I am."

Even those who liked her least would have been compelled to confess that Harty Carlisle made no attempt to glorify her degradation. Badly, meanly as others might think of her, she thought more badly and meanly of herself. Indeed, the only thing that lifted her for an instant out of the mire of humiliation in which she was struggling was a pang of fierce curiosity which nearly paralysed her now and again as she "wondered" about the way in which Claude had heard of it from Jack Ferrier, and marvelled in what words he had responded to the tidings. Had he betrayed and denounced her as she deserved to be betrayed and denounced? She conjured up a dozen mind-pictures of the scene between the two friends, and they were all of them frightful, and utterly unlike the reality.

There had, in fact, been no scene whatever. To his old friend, in the presence of Mrs. Powers, Jack Ferrier announced his recently-formed engagement to the "dearest little girl in the world," and Claude instantly lifted a glass to his lips, and firmly wished them both "all happiness through all time." That was all he said, but he listened with courteous attention to his aunt's statement of belief in Harty's power of inciting a man on to soar to any heights. "An invaluable wife for you, Mr. Ferrier; a clever, ambitious, bewitching girl. I do most heartily congratulate you." But even as she said these words Jack Ferrier noticed that she glanced at her nephew, and seemed anxious.

"Let's have a weed on the terrace," Jack petitioned when Mrs. Powers left them, and as soon as they got out into the free happy air he slipped his hand through Claude's arm, and, with almost boyish confidentialness, said:

"I say, old fellow, you loved her too, just at first, didn't you?"

"God bless her, I shall love her always," Claude answered, rather falteringly; "but it's all right, old fellow, if she loves you now. We'll let the dead past bury its dead."

"Her judgment must have been distorted when she refused you and accepted me," Jack Ferrier laughed.

"We'll drop all mention of me in the matter, please," Claude said very gently. He felt that his friend was guiltless of the great offence of having won her from him wittingly. But this being the case, how the girl must have misled Jack, or how false a part she must have played to him!

In the long watches of the night it came to him to feel and believe that there must be some mistake in the matter. It couldn't be Harty who had done this thing. Jack had spoken of her as "Miss Carlisle"—it might be Mabel.

He felt the full folly of clinging to this possibility, and yet he would cling to it. He felt the full folly of writing that one questioning line, and yet he would write it, though he knew that the answer to it would be confirmation strong, of the worst he could think of the woman who had warped his life.

Her answer came, and Claude Powers put her out of his heart, that is, he put away from him all thought of the possibility of ever loving her with a reasonable result. "I must go away," he told himself. "The English life is over for me, but the prospect of living a little longer in the sun

and the glory of the East smiles upon me still."

And while he was thinking this he looked out of the window, and saw Jack Ferrier riding away towards Dillsborough, looking so happy and successful, in admirably-made grey clothes, on a dancing chestnut mare, and Claude thought of the girl to whom Jack was riding, and of the greeting she could give to the man she loved, and in a storm of passion he cursed the insane esprit de corps which had led him to place such a hard alternative before the living love for the sake of the dead friend. But even in the first white heat of his passion and disappointment about her, even while that fair fabric of faith in her which he had erected was being shattered to pieces, he never had a harsh thought of, or gave one harsh word to, the girl.

The keenest hope that he had left to him concerning this matter was the one that Jack Ferrier might never come to a full understanding of the relations that had existed between himself (Claude) and Harty. "If he does his happiness will be poisoned, poor old boy, and he will never think the same of her again," he thought. And then he resolved that never a hint should be given by him of all the deep feelings which had made up a goodly portion of his life for the last few years. But to keep to this resolution it was necessary that he should get himself away, that he should not see her until years had tamed and withered the bloom off some of the feelings that were so cruelly fresh now.

The immediate difficulty of arranging a scheme by which he might get himself away from the atmosphere of the happy lovers without arousing Jack's suspicion as to the real cause of his departure, was, comparatively speaking, healthy exercise for him. It kept him from that stagnant mood which depresses one physically to a dangerous degree. For if his move was to be efficacious it must be made quickly. Nevertheless, though he believed it to be his only alternative, he rather dreaded making the announcement of it to Jack. For Jack would wonder, and surmise, and speculate with magnificent breadth and freedom about the why and wherefore of it.

In the mean time the man whom Harty was teaching herself to believe in as the real Happy Prince had ridden over to Dillsborough, and been thoroughly viewed and reviewed by the inhabitants of that sympathetic little town. Mrs. Greyling had seen him dismount at the Devenishes'

door, and her sharp vision had at once discerned about him the unmistakable air. "One of those girls has caught him," she observed to her daughter Agnes, "but we ought to be humbly thankful that it isn't Claude who has been taken in."

"If Harty is the catcher I wish it had been Mr. Powers," Agnes answered, "for then she would have stayed among us still; a good deal of life will go out of Dillsborough when Harty Carlisle goes away."

"A Powers of the Court can hardly marry the first wayfarer that comes along," Mrs. Greyling said, good-temperedly; "it's quite different with that young man his friend. I really hope it may be Harty; if it is I shall advise her mother not to permit a long engagement." And then Mrs. Greyling went on to wonder whether the Devenishes would be guilty of the folly, in their circumstances, of "having a show wedding." "I shall certainly advise," she said, "that they do not put themselves to the trouble and expense."

Mr. Devenish, it may be said, was feeling his tongue tied and his teeth drawn by his knowledge of the fact of the relationship between the poor boy who had died by his own hand, and this man who was going to take Harty out of bondage. He was therefore unwontedly quiet and non-exacting, even to the point of meeting Mr. Ferrier with something like deprecation in his manner. "Miserable circumstances which can never be explained without implicating others have surrounded me and given you a false impression," he muttered to Jack. And Jack in the flush of his new adventure into the unknown land of real love, was hearty in his assurances that by-gones were by-gones, and that he bore malice to no man. In short, there was so much sunshine in the home atmosphere that Harty felt her heart lightened of its gloom in a great measure, and ceased for a while to look upon herself as the most miserable of all sinners. For though Jack Ferrier had made but brief mention of Claude and Claude's reception of the latest intelligence, she knew that he had acted and spoken as Claude only could, as Claude ever would, generously, tenderly, chivalrously.

Once or twice the vile, mean temptation assailed her to bury it all in oblivion, and as Claude had held his tongue, to hold hers, and leave Jack Ferrier in happy unenlightenment. But her better, braver spirit prevailed, and she made a solemn vow to put herself before her future husband in

her true colours as soon as she had an opportunity. "He will feel that I must love him best or I wouldn't marry him," she thought, "and so he will forgive me for what fate has made me do and undo." And half unconsciously she felt that it was possible Jack might feel gratified by the tribute it would be to his taste, that the woman he had chosen and won should have been so long and well loved by Claude Powers. In spite of her experience her knowledge of men was miserably weak and limited still. But by reason of her ignorance she tasted happiness and hope just a little longer.

They went out for a stroll along the Leeth meadows that afternoon, and there with its slow waters gliding peacefully along, Harty sought to make her opportunity. But before she could do it there was some pleasant heartfelt nonsense talked, and if had not been for occasional glimpses of the Court woods—wherein every leaf and twig reminded her of Claude—Harty would have been very happy.

"My imaginary bride has always been a brilliant blonde on rather a colossal scale, Harty," Jack Ferrier said, looking down admiringly at dusky-headed, brunette-faced Harty. Then he hummed Blumenthal's melody, and presently broke into the words of that sweet song, *My Queen*:

"I will not dream of her tall and stately,
She that I love may be fairy-light;
I will not say, she should walk sedately,
Whatever she does, it will sure to be right."

"Did you always think whatever I did right, Jack," she asked, trying hard to bring herself to the point of telling him of the greatest wrong she had ever wrought in her life.

"Well, yes, as a rule; just once or twice I thought you might have flirted less with dear old Claude."

"I never flirted with him in my life," she said, and then a ball rose up in her throat, and she knew she could not trust herself to give her explanation just yet.

"Do you know the last verse of *My Queen*," she asked presently; and when he said "Yes," she said "Sing it," and he chanted out:

"But she must be courteous, she must be holy,
Pure in her spirit that lady I love,
Whether her birth be noble or lowly,
I care no more than the spirit above.
And I'll give my heart to my lady's keeping,
And ever her strength on mine shall lean,
And the stars shall fall, and the angels be weeping,
Ere I cease to love her, my queen, my queen!"

He looked down into her eyes as he finished, looked down with a look that told her of his firm belief in her being the

realisation of this fair ideal. And the girl could bear it no longer. The moment had come, and the girl who was faulty, but never intentionally false, was ready.

"Do you think me all that, Jack?" she faltered. And when he told her, "Yes, and a thousand times better," she said, "Poor boy," with a face so full of pity for him, that it was like the shock of an earthquake to him.

"Harty, I wish you wouldn't conjure up imaginary evil spirits, my darling," he said, tenderly.

"They're not imaginary; they're so real that I must tell you about them, Jack," she said, softly and sorrowfully. "I'm not holy and pure in spirit; I have wickedly deceived, and weakly fallen away from a person, but I think you'll forgive me?"

How she clung to that hope still. How gratefully she responded to the reassuring pressure of his hand.

"It's rather a long story; it began when I was quite a young girl," she said, pathetically. Then, with a natural revulsion to her self-imposed task of self-accusation, she asked impatiently, "Jack, haven't you an idea of it? Hasn't Claude given you a hint of it, that may spare me some of the telling, at least?" she asked, vainly; and he still half laughed at her, and told her that he knew Claude had been lightly scorched by her charms when they first came to Dillsborough, but that she exaggerated the business in thinking that either he or any other man could possibly blame her for what was inevitable.

"Then you think it began here?" she asked.

He opened his eyes a little wider at this question, but did not open his mind for the reception of the full fact just yet.

"My dear child, I'm not a Sir Galahad myself, as I have assured you already; I'm not idiot enough to believe that you can have gone along all this time without having fancied yourself in love, and flirted a good deal. I don't mind that a bit; a girl may be as straight as a die, and yet get into a dozen fixes of that sort; what I couldn't stand in any woman I thought of for a wife, would be, that she had led a fellow on with lies, and then thrown him over; I couldn't——"

"Stop, stop," she cried out, sharply, under the influence of an utterly new pain. "You've worded it hardly enough, but, Jack, that is exactly what I have done to

Claude Powers; they weren't all lies, for I did love him so dearly once, and then you came, and it all grew, until it has come to this, that I'm bound in honour to stand here, and tell you what you'll hate me for."

She was so humble, she was so fascinating in her humility, that he wished to delay the probable repentance, which would be his portion, for a moment or two longer, and strove to make her say that it was her over-sensitiveness on the point which led her to try and shock him so, that it was her exaggerated love of the picturesque which was leading her to dash in this study of a storm on the canvas whence this portion of their lives was being painted.

For answer to this she gave him all the story, in words that proved to him how well she knew it, darkening no portion of it morbidly, but assuredly lightening no portion of it selfishly. She put herself in her true colours, with a passionate force that made him recoil from, and still love her more. And through it all he did so cling to the hope that her keen sense of honour, aroused fully now, was causing her to exaggerate her own weakness and failing.

As a drowning man catches at a straw, he caught at the belief that at least, since she had been giving him soft sweet looks, and words that would ring in his ears while he lived, that at least, since these had been her gifts to him, she had been decorously cold and un-Harty-like generally to Claude. And on this hope he stayed himself in silence for some time, while the girl went on saying bitterer words of herself than either of these men could ever be brought to utter of her. But at length, in an evil hour for her, he spoke the testing question.

"You have let him see latterly that you had found out your mistake, and that you cared more for me than you ever could for him, didn't you, Harty dear?" he asked, in perfect faith. And for answer Harty had to say: "He never suspected that I ever thought of another man until I wrote to him this morning, telling him I was going to marry you."

"You've kept him on till the last? You've kept him on after it began with me? No, no, Harty; you don't mean what you're saying. You're doing it to try me, to find out if I'm a scoundrel or not. No, dear, I wouldn't behave like a black-guard cur to Claude Powers, even for you."

"But I'm telling you the truth," she said.

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